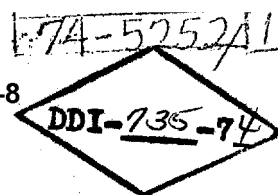


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Approved For Release 2005/08/03 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000300060053-8



12 MAR 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : Relations with the Press

1. Thank you for your straightforward memorandum on the problem raised for you by our relations with the press. As I know you are aware, I have not been satisfied with my handling of a couple of these matters, and I think it useful for you to raise the matter with me formally.

2. We face two conflicting pressures. First is the statutory requirement to protect intelligence sources and methods, which is supplemented by the tradition of almost total secrecy in the intelligence business among our foreign liaisons, our agents and our own staffs. The other is the pressure imposed by our constitutionally open society, which is supplemented by the current political atmosphere of exposure. This latter pressure comes to bear particularly in the many proposals for substantial modification of our unique authorities and our procedures for Congressional oversight and appropriation.

3. We must resolve the conflict between these pressures in a fashion to protect that secrecy which is essential to our functions and to our liaison and operational relations. We must at the same time maintain the confidence and credibility of the majority of the American people and their elected representatives that we operate within our statutory limits and that their investment in intelligence contributes to the security and well being of our country.

4. I believe that this matter may be approached by the identification of four levels of information, with corresponding degrees of exposure at each. In this process we may well move toward greater exposure of matters which were formerly restricted. Such movement may require care in order to reduce the external political and internal morale repercussions of such moves:

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(a) The first level, of course, is unclassified. As in the case of the CIA highway sign, this can arouse some public and employee comment. Steps such as this

[REDACTED]

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a substantial reason. The elimination of some of our former secretiveness about nonessential matters can in fact substantially increase our credibility and acceptability with respect to the second set of pressures enumerated above. It is essential, of course, to recognize that some things may not seem to need classification at a particular point of time but if recorded may adversely affect a situation which should be classified later on.

[REDACTED]

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Obviously the step of moving a matter formally from a classified to an unclassified status should be undertaken through authorized channels at authorized levels and not be the personal selection of any employee who happens to think it desirable (this of course is the basis of our contest with Mr. Marchetti). My reading of the overall climate of America these days suggests that I should move to disclose a number of matters of this type, e.g., "the fact of" overhead reconnaissance, by general reference to a line of activity, but without specifics which still must be held secret. The purpose in such cases is to try to remove the aura of sensationalism around intelligence and increase the sophistication of the American public as to what intelligence entails, so there is no basis for the charge that we are operating in a fashion beyond what our people would permit if they knew the truth. I have taken such a step, for example, in my open reference to my view that it is appropriate for us to collect foreign intelligence in America from foreigners. My moves in this direction with respect to [REDACTED] were conspicuously less successful, I confess, but I think the key to my difficulties there lay in the fact that I was overly specific in giving numbers and therefore provided the elements of hard stories which would not have existed if I had spoken in more general terms. I will try to respect this lesson in the future.

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(b) The second level is perhaps best described as the "backgrounder." Again, this does not consist of technically classified information, but it can consist of judgments and generalities based upon classified intelligence collection and analysis. In this fashion a number of matters can be made available to the press and other elements of American society, allowing these recipients to benefit from the intelligence investment of the United States but not putting CIA or the Intelligence Community in the pull-and-haul of political contests. It is clear that care is needed in this category not to reveal information which could only come from highly sensitive sources, although the passage of time, even days, frequently lessens the risk that the information pinpoints a specific source. Certain intelligence information can also be made available to the public through other elements of the United States Government, e.g., the Department of Commerce, the CIEP, Joint Congressional Committees, etc. I believe it in our net interest to provide as much information as possible through such channels so that the benefits of the intelligence investment can be made available to more of our citizenry.

(c) Classified material obviously should not be made available to unauthorized recipients (although conclusions resting upon it can in many cases be made available per the above). Classified material is used in testifying to Congressional Committees on subjects of interest to them and can be given to individual Senators and Congressmen as well as other officials of the Executive Department who have a reasonable need therefor. In such cases the identification as classified should be made in the same fashion as is done in the Executive Branch. The simplest form of this on the Congressional side is an Executive Session hearing. Material of this sort can include Top Secret and even compartmented material where it is of importance to individual or Committee recipients. This material is also subject to the declassification provisions of Executive Order 11652. It is in our interest to be responsive to the requirements of the Executive Order and declassify material where this can be legitimately and appropriately done because the matter is out of date or otherwise loses its need for further classification.

(d) Operational matters: the names of our agents, our more sensitive and complicated intelligence operations themselves (technical, political, etc.), specific cover and support arrangements, etc. These matters are handled

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within the Agency on a need-to-know basis, and efforts are in process to tighten up by a bigot system and other compartmentation devices knowledge of this kind of information even within the Agency and the Intelligence Community itself. Such matters are subject, however, to report to our duly authorized authorities or coordination points within the Executive Branch and to the Subcommittees of the Senate and the House Armed Services and Appropriations Committees. In certain situations some of these matters have had to be and will have to be exposed to members of Congress or Senators who are not members of such Subcommittees, but this should be done only with the knowledge and at the suggestion of the Chairmen of these Subcommittees and with full stress on its sensitive nature and the need for secrecy. These matters are also subject to the declassification arrangements of Executive Order 11652. However, in many of these cases the date on which the need for classification expires is "impossible to determine" since the revelation of such a source or method can have an impact on the possibility of recruiting, retaining, or exploiting new sources and methods in the same or comparable categories.

4. In conclusion, there are some "bad secrets" which are properly revealed by an aggressive press in our Constitutional system, there are some older "non-secrets" which no longer need to be kept secret and which we should gradually surface, but there are some "good secrets" which deserve greater protection than we have been able to give them, in part by reason of their association with "secrets" of lesser importance. There have been stumbles (some by me) in the process of delineating these categories and their precise content. I do believe, however, that the basic outline is appropriate and gives us a guideline to follow.


W. E. Colby
Director

P.S. Please feel free to pass this along to members of your Directorate as you wish.

cc: DDCI Assistant to the Director
DDI OLC
DDS&T OGC
DDM&S IG
D/DCI/IC
D/DCI/NIO

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